Small Groups Are Weird

We are all a little weird. And we like to think that there is always someone weirder. I mean, I am sure some of you are looking at me and thinking, “Well, at least I am not as weird as you,” and I am thinking, “Well, at least I am not as weird as the people in the loony bin,” and the people in the loony bin are thinking, “Well, at least I am an orange.” —Jim Gaffigan, Dad Is Fat

Let’s go ahead and get this out of the way from the beginning: to the normal church outsider, small groups are weird. Those of us who are tasked with convincing people in our churches that joining a small group is something they should do have an uphill battle. Here are just

• Our first attempt at a connection event was a disaster.
• Despite implementing several layers of redundancy in our communications system, people still occasionally are not contacted when they sign up for a group.
• We are on our third different groups database in three years.
• We still do not have a great system for measuring spiritual health in our groups.

It’s conceivable that we will reach a 90 percent participation level in our groups, but not without a ton of hustle and mistakes along the way. And with everything we have accomplished in the last four years, there is still a long way to go. We will continue to tweak and start over as many times as we need to until every person in our circle of influence is being discipled within a growing biblical community.

Think It Over
• What is the driving vision for groups in your church?
• What group models have you seen work best in churches?
• How many options do you currently offer attendees for spiritual growth? Are any of those pulling people away from being in small groups?
• List the potential benefits of small groups for your church.
• What is your current groups system? Is it time to be changed or tweaked to be more effective?
Small Groups Are Weird

Think It Over

• What is the driving vision for groups in your church?
• What group models have you seen work best in churches?
• How many options do you currently offer attendees for spiritual growth? Are any of those pulling people away from being in small groups?
• List the potential benefits of small groups for your church.
• What is your current groups system? Is it time to be changed or tweaked to be more effective?
Reaching the Fringes

Think It Over

• Who are we missing with our current connection strategies?
• What can we change to make it easier for introverts to be in community?
• What are some common interests we could use to rally men into groups?
• Is there a lifestyle or sin issue that should keep someone from being in a group?
• What kinds of issues might arise if we open community up to everyone?
• How can we design groups to reach those beyond the doors of our church?
Discipleship Is the Goal

Think It Over

• What is your current discipleship strategy?
• If you do not have a discipleship strategy, what is the first step for implementing one?
• How are you measuring spiritual growth through your small groups?
• What opportunities are you offering people to live out what they’re learning?
A Clean Slate

Think It Over

• What needs to be blown up in your current groups system?
• What do you consider to be a win for your small groups?
• Who is the champion for groups at your church? If it is not the senior leader, why not?
• Are you putting enough into the budget for the future of groups?
• What do you need to clear away for groups to be successful?
• If nothing were impossible, what would you attempt with groups? Dream big!
Search for Leadership

Think It Over

• Do you currently have enough leaders to handle your growth?
• Where are you looking for most of your leaders?
• Do you need to consider lowering the bar for leadership?
• What kind of training do you offer your leaders? Should you move some of it online to reach more potential leaders?
• How well are you keeping your leaders? Are they free to take breaks?
• Do you have a clearly defined leadership pipeline for leaders to follow?
• Was your last staff hire an effective small-group leader from within your system? Why or why not?
Connecting the Crowd

Think It Over

- What is your current strategy for bringing new people into community? Is it effective?
- How difficult is it to start new groups in your church?
- Do you currently offer all-church studies for your groups? If not, why not?
- What are your on- and off-ramps for people to get into groups? Are they easy to take?
- How common is it for people on stage to talk about groups in your church?
- Where are small groups on your church’s priority list? Are they functioning as a front door for people?
Connecting the Crowd

We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.

—Dorothy Day,
The Long Loneliness

You may have designed the best small-groups system you possibly could. You may have handpicked, mentored, and trained the brightest leaders in your church. But none of it matters if the majority of the people in your church never get connected to a group. We can spend so much time and efforts designing the structure and then assume people will just show up.

No matter how difficult you make the entry points, you can count on a core of 20 percent at least giving it a try. They are so committed 00-01_Small Groups for the Rest of Us.indd   93 6/25/15   2:45 PM

40 percent who would never walk into our churches. Resource allocations should reflect how important they are to the vision of the gospel.

Think It Over

• What is your current strategy for bringing new people into community? Is it effective?
• How difficult is it to start new groups in your church?
• Do you currently offer all-church studies for your groups? If not, why not?
• What are your on- and off-ramps for people to get into groups? Are they easy to take?
• How common is it for people on stage to talk about groups in your church?
• Where are small groups on your church’s priority list? Are they functioning as a front door for people?

Small Groups for the Rest of Us

Setting Expectations

Think It Over

• Have you defined what an official small group is at your church? Are they different from ministry teams?
• What are the core elements every successful small group should experience?
• Do you agree that small-group leaders should not teach? Why or why not?
• What are your expectations for curriculum choices in your groups? How many of them are DVD-based teaching?
• What is the ideal size for groups at your church?
• Are you currently clear with your expectations for leaders and hosts? How can you better refine those expectations?
Those Questions

Think It Over

• What are the major questions you consistently hear from your small-group leaders?
• Are you answering questions they are not asking in your training?
• Do you currently have an agreement or covenant with your leaders?
• Do you believe that small groups and Sunday school can coexist successfully?
• What is the limit of care for your volunteer leaders?
• What is your process for hiring staff when the time is right?
• What other questions should you be asking right now?